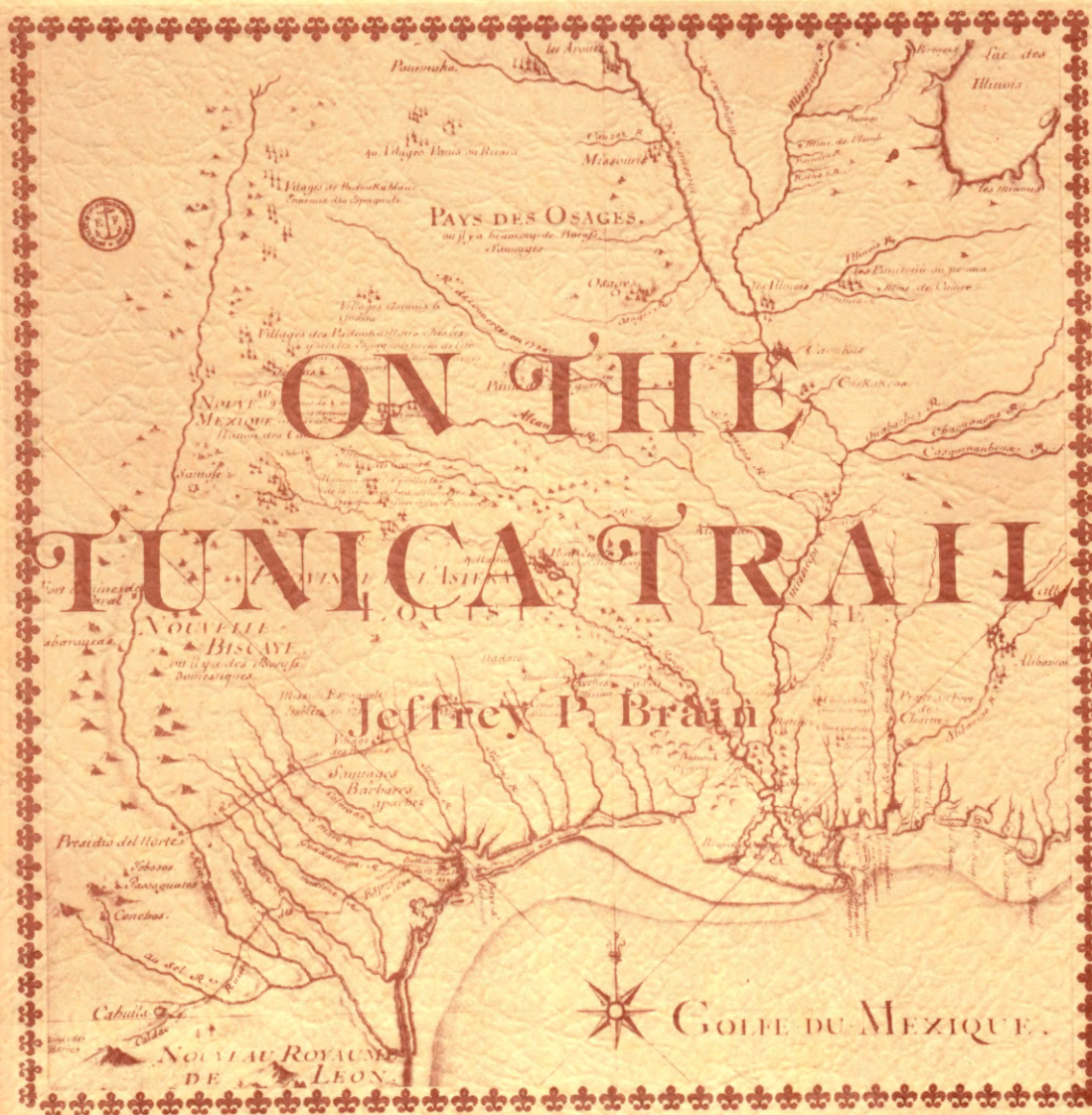


Louisiana Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission

Anthropological Study No. 1



June 1977

Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

STATE OF LOUISIANA

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Louisiana Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission

Anthropological Study No. 1

ON THE
TUNICA TRAIL

Jeffrey P. Brain

June 1977

Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Editor's Note

More than 10,000 years of human settlement in Louisiana have left a cultural heritage that is both rich and informative. With the publication of "On the Tunica Trail," the Louisiana Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission is pleased to launch a series of *Anthropological Studies* that will illuminate some of the major episodes in Louisiana's past.

Our first author, Dr. Jeffrey P. Brain, is one of the nation's outstanding authorities on the Tunica Indians. His research has been sponsored by his home institution, the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, and by the National Geographic Society. Most recently, Dr. Brain has participated in a joint investigation with the Louisiana Archaeological Survey at an historic Tunica Indian site on the Angola penal farm. The joint venture tested many of the conclusions presented in this study.

Recognizing that the past belongs to everyone, and not just to a handful of scholars, the *Anthropological Studies* adopt a style and format directed to a general audience. It is hoped that these studies will bring cultural enrichment to the people of Louisiana and stimulate an interest in preserving our historic and archaeological resources for enjoyment and study by future generations.

Alan Toth
State Archaeologist

Introduction

The Tunica are a good people . . . They have become nearly extinct . . . They had come down the Mississippi [to the place] where they lived.

Haas 1950:143

In their own folklore, this is a capsule history of an exceptional group of North American Indians. The Tunica (which may be translated as “the people”) were one of a small number of Lower Mississippi Valley tribes which played a very important role in late prehistoric and early historic events in the valley. As with most Indian groups in North America, during the past 250 years the Tunica have dwindled to a small remnant population who have largely adopted the prevailing Euro-American life style. Yet at the time of European contact they were one of the most populous and vibrant tribes in the alluvial valley of Mississippi and Louisiana.

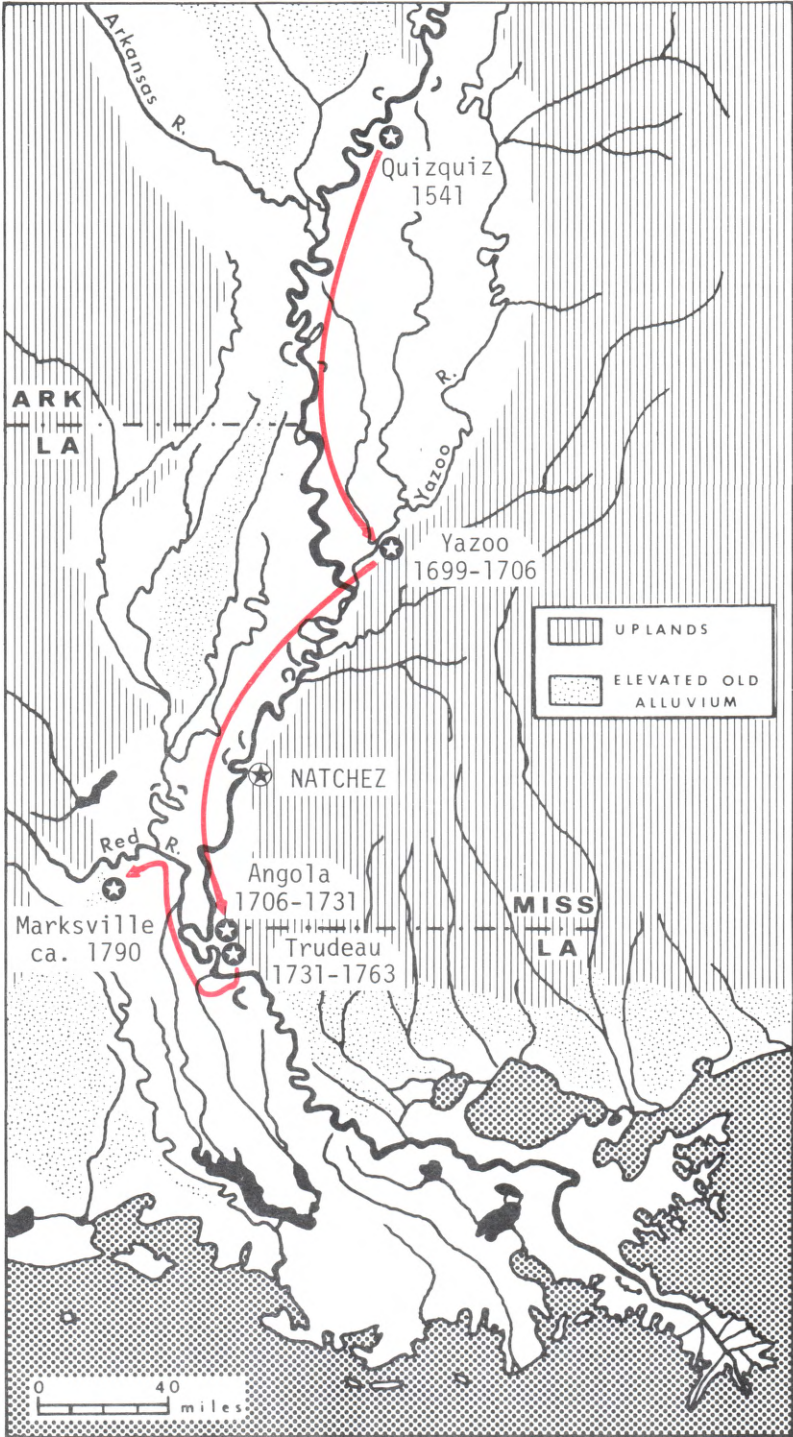
Similar in cultural heritage to many other Indian groups in the southeastern United States, and especially in the Mississippi Valley, the Tunica nevertheless have a special significance for the native history of the area. Unlike most Lower Valley tribes, they are not lost to history but instead are still amongst us on their tribal lands in Marksville, Louisiana.

Just before the arrival of Europeans, the Lower Mississippi Valley from the vicinity of Vicksburg south was the domain of the great native power briefly referred to as Quigualtam in the narratives of the De Soto expedition (Elvas 1904:153ff). The Quigualtam encountered by the Spanish entrada in the mid 16th century became the Natchez by the time the French arrived at the very end of the 17th century. The Natchez had lost some of the power enjoyed by their predecessors, presumably because they had been reduced drastically in numbers by debilitating European diseases. Nevertheless, the Natchez retained the position of the pre-eminent Lower Valley tribe during the early historic period.

Upstream, in northwestern Mississippi, was another great center of power spawned in the late prehistoric period by expansion of the Mississippian cultural tradition from its core area near the confluence of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri rivers. One of the groups partici

pating in the Mississippian tradition, which represents the zenith of native North American cultural attainment, was called the Quizquiz. Their capital was a town with the same name that was located close to where De Soto “discovered” the Mississippi River in 1541 (Brain and others 1974). As in the case of the Natchez, disease and population decline apparently led to a breakdown of social and political structures during the 17th century. When the French found the remnants of great Quizquiz on the lower Yazoo River in 1699 they were called the Tunica.

It is in the time and setting outlined above that the Tunica became known to history. Like other Indian groups they were left adrift in a changing native world which was soon to change beyond native recognition as the Europeans began to take control. The history of the Tunica and their ethnic continuity are the twin themes that are to be explored in the following pages. The story starts with the first known identification of the Tunica at the fabled town of Quizquiz.



Migrations of the Tunica.

Quizquiz

One mid-day we came upon a town called Quizquiz, and so suddenly to the inhabitants, that they were without any notice of us, the men being away at work in the maize-fields. We took more than three hundred women, and the few skins and shawls they had in their houses.

Biedma 1904:25

Off to one side of the town was the dwelling place of the Curaca [chief]. It was situated on a high mound which now served as a fortress. Only by means of two stairways could one ascend to this house. Here many Indians gathered while others sought refuge in a very wild forest lying between the town and the Great River [the Mississippi]. The lord of the province, who like his land was called (Quizquiz), was now old and sick in bed; but on hearing the noise and confusion in his village, he arose and came from his bedchamber. Then beholding the pillage and the seizure of his vassals, he grasped a battle-ax and began to descend the stairs with the greatest fury, in the meantime vowing loudly and fiercely to slay anyone who came into his land without permission. Thus this wretched creature threatened when he had neither the person nor the strength to kill a cat, for besides being ill, he was very old and shriveled. Indeed among all the Indians that the Spaniards saw in Florida [as the entire southeastern United States was known to the Spanish], they found none other of such wretched appearance. But the memory of the valiant deeds and triumphs of his bellicose youth, and the fact that he held sway over a province so large and good as his, gave him the strength to utter those fierce threats and even fiercer ones.

Garcilaso 1951:423-424

These excerpts from the De Soto narratives have not been quoted at such length to emphasize the “bellicose” nature of ancient Quizquiz so much as to demonstrate the character and achievements of the early Tunica. Quizquiz almost certainly represents the first record of the people known to later history as the Tunica (Brain and others 1974). There are several points of interest, then, about this “province so large and good” that are pertinent to our story.

The confrontation at Quizquiz was certainly of no little significance. The Spaniards had been severely bloodied in conflicts with other Indian groups just prior to arriving at Quizquiz, and being confronted by the prospect of determined resistance (purportedly reinforced by

“almost four thousand armed warriors . . . within less than three hours after their arrival in this town” Garcilaso 1951:425), they sued for peace. This was a most novel move for the hitherto arrogant and uncompromising conquistadores. It is significant that it was at Quizquiz they were first brought to humbler attitudes, for it was there that they first encountered a segment of the great Mississippian cultural development. These were peoples who could raise great armies in a few hours; but these were also peoples whose men tended the agricultural fields, and who built walled towns containing large mounds upon which their chiefs were accustomed to reside. These peoples were the progenitors of the Tunica.

Quizquiz was located in northwestern Mississippi near the town of Friars Point and a short distance above the confluence of the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers. It is an interesting historical footnote that this point was the southern frontier of the Mississippian thrust in the mid-16th century. It is a coincidence of even greater significance for the history of the tribe that the location can be linked with the Tunica. Being a brief contact, there are no clues to this significance in the De Soto narratives, but the subsequent history of the Tunica demonstrates that a strategic riverine position was a primary consideration in the location of their settlements.

The De Soto narratives give ample testimony to the fact that there was considerable native conflict in the vicinity of Quizquiz (presumably the “memory of the valiant deeds and triumphs of his bellicose youth” cited above). There is evidence that new Mississippian peoples were pushing into the area. Despite the impression conveyed in the narratives, the Quizquiz-Tunica peoples were to react as they consistently did in the historical record, and probably had for centuries before: they were to take the path of least resistance, and move yet further south.

Here a disjunction in the historical record must be recognized before the story can be continued. There was a hiatus of more than a century and a half before European contact next was made with the Tunica and at that time they were a modest tribe who numbered only a few hundred warriors, a pale reflection of great Quizquiz (even discounting the customary exaggerations of the De Soto narratives). While the Spanish entrada had little apparent political, cultural, or

economic effect upon the Indians, its biological effect must have been enormous. Unaccustomed diseases were introduced which ravaged the native populations. Quizquiz must have suffered horribly, but so also other groups, including those of the Lower Valley cultures affiliated with Quigualtam to the south. The earlier odds were more or less evened, and so, faced with continuing pressure from the north, the Quizquiz-Tunica moved south sometime between 1541 and 1699.

Yazoo

We arrived at the Tonicas [Tunica], about sixty leagues below the Akanseas [the Arkansas Indians near the mouth of the river that still bears their name]. The first village is four leagues from the Micissippi inland on the bank of a quite pretty river; they are dispersed in little villages; they cover in all four leagues of country; they are about 260 cabins . . . They are very peaceable people, well disposed, much attached to the French, living entirely on Indian corn, they are employed solely on their fields; they do not hunt like the other Indians.

La Source 1861:80-81

In 1699, as described above, the French found the Tunica on the Yazoo River near its confluence with the Mississippi. La Source was one of an intrepid group of missionaries from Quebec who were looking for new souls to save, and in the process were to serve the imperial aspirations of France as she strove for control of the Mississippi Valley. This first contact returned the Tunica to history, and the fact that they were of such good nature and well disposed to the French brought them the attentions of the French missionary effort. A certain Father Antoine Davion was a member of La Source's group, and he elected to establish a mission among the Tunica. He was already elderly when he established his post, and he apparently had great difficulty learning the native languages. Nevertheless, he was remarkable among the early French missionaries in sticking to his post for some twenty years even though his labors produced few converts.

Although Father Davion's service to God was with little reward—and he eventually returned to France to die in disappointment and disgrace—he had served king and country well. The early disposition of the Tunica was reinforced, and they became even more attached to the French. Davion saw himself as an instrument of God, but the Tunica apparently viewed him as the means to direct and

continuing access to European material culture. They rejected his religion, but avidly accepted his worldly goods. This response to European contact was not unusual among native groups, but in this special case of the Tunica it has more than usual significance, for it is a key to their distinctive life-way and to their subsequent history.



Bottles, earthenware containers, dishes, and glass beads from Trudeau exemplify the elements of European technology that the Tunica were eager to accept.

That the Tunica were the heirs to ancient Quizquiz is indicated by their apparent emphasis upon agriculture, as cited above, and the suggestion that such activities were the responsibility of the men, an unusual development among native North Americans. Further support is provided by Father Gravier, a contemporary of Davion's, who specifically notes that unlike other tribes, "the men do here what peasants do in France; they cultivate and dig the earth, plant and harvest the crops . . . The women do only indoor work, make the earthen pots and their clothes" (Gravier 1861:134-135). Additional indication of the identification of the Tunica with Quizquiz is provided by the fact that when the Tunica left the vicinity of the mouth of the Arkansas, they settled at the next major riverine confluence to the south: that of the Yazoo and the Mississippi.

The two facts cited above—the predilection of the Tunica for European goods and their choice for settlement at prime commercial crossroads—are significant observations. They not only recognized the value of the newly introduced items, but they were able to "capitalize" upon them in the classic economic sense of the word. Their success is dramatically demonstrated by the extraordinary wealth of European material that has been recovered from the Trudeau site, to be discussed below.

As already mentioned, the desirability of European technology and its artifacts was recognized by all native groups. What makes the Tunica case exceptional is that they were able to accumulate unusual quantities, in fact unprecedented quantities, of these goods. They did so by making themselves indispensable to the French in two ways. First, as overtly stated in the contemporary records, the Tunica were important allies in the political and military schemes of the French (and to a lesser extent other colonial powers) during the initial contact period. This period of importance lasted until the final conflict with the Natchez in 1729-1730, and then declined. A secondary importance, hitherto given little recognition, was their less obvious but more enduring economic ability. The Tunica were traders and entrepreneurs of the first order, as is most overtly manifested by their control of such major communication points as river confluences. They were not mere toll collectors, however, for there is evidence that they controlled a vital element of trade. They were a major factor in the manufacture and distribution of salt, an *indispensable* commodity to native and European alike (Keslin 1964). As observed by the great historian, John R. Swanton:

The Tunica were much engaged in the boiling down and selling of salt.
(1946:819)

When the French entered the country, trade in salt was still active but most salt seems to have been extracted in northern Louisiana. The Tunica Indians are particularly mentioned in connection with it . . .
(ibid: 738)

By 1682, the Tunica had concentrated upon Yazoo River a few miles above its mouth, though parties were scattered through the forests of northeastern Louisiana to boil salt with which they were in the habit of trading. . .
(ibid: 197-198)

The trade in salt was clearly a prehistoric development that the Tunica were able to turn to their advantage with the Europeans as well. But to the credit of the Tunica, and their ultimate advantage, they were not committed to this one vital resource, as we shall see.



Archaeologists expose a marine shell necklace and small copper bells at Angola. The shell necklace is a native trade item obtained from the Gulf coastal area, while the bells were manufactured in Europe.



Completed excavation of the aboriginal shell necklace recovered at a Tunica village at Angola.

Angola Farm

Then they went down the Mississippi again. (Their) big boats were tied together. They went (on) down until the rope broke. One (of) the boats went on down (the river). Then the other (boat) came to a stop on the shore. They settled again near that place. They did not see the other boat. It went on down the Mississippi. The Tunica settled there.

Haas 1950:133

According to contemporary French accounts, the Tunica were driven from the Yazoo by Chickasaw raids instigated by the English. Whether or not it was that simple, there certainly was unrest in the Yazoo region and the Tunica again removed themselves from a theater which disrupted their accustomed activities. Because the Natchez, their age-old rivals, were immediately to the south, the Tunica had to move past them all the way down to the vicinity of the Red River confluence,

again the next most major riverine junction. This move did not seriously affect their control of the salt trade, for the Red River was an alternate route to that resource. Furthermore, it provided them with the opportunity to take control of a new resource, a resource of even greater value which was to lead to even more accumulated wealth for the Tunica.



Brass sleigh bells, a Liberty type bell, a crucifix, a gunlock, and other pieces of flintlock rifles from Angola are representative of French trade goods accumulated by the Tunica.

But, first, once again the conflicts of European and Indian interaction were to intrude:

One night they [the Tunica] gave a ball. Once more some Indians [the Natchez] came. They were dancing. At midnight they stopped. Unaware (of danger) they [the Tunica] went to bed and slept. The Indians fought them again. Nevertheless, the Tunica repulsed them.

Haas 1950:133

... a considerable party of the Natchez carried the pipe of peace to the Grand Chief of the Tonicas, under pretence of concluding a peace with him and all the French. The Chief sent to M. Perrier to know his pleasure: but the Natchez in the mean time assassinated the Tonicas, beginning with their Grand Chief; and few of them escaped his treachery.

La Page du Pratz 1774:93

Thus occurred one of the greatest disasters in recorded Tunica history. This event was an immediate sequel to the Natchez tragedy. The French had defeated and scattered the Natchez on the field of battle, but had not destroyed them. Apparently, the remaining Natchez harbored deep resentment against their old enemies, the Tunica, for the role they had played in the ruination of Natchez order. Under false guise of reconciliation, a refugee group of Natchez contacted the Tunica in April 1731 with dark designs in mind. A fuller account of this sad story is given by Charlevoix, Historian of New France:

In the month of April, the Head Chief of the Tonicas (Cahura Joligo) descended to New Orleans, and told (Governor) Perrier that while he was hunting four Natchez had come to him to beg him to make terms for them with the French, adding that all, including those who had taken refuge among the Chickasaws, asked to be received and pardoned; that they would reside wherever it was wished, but that they should be glad to be near the Tonicas, and that he came to ascertain his intentions.

Perrier replied that he consented to their settling two leagues from his village, but not nearer, to avoid all occasion of quarrel between the two nations; but that above all things, he exacted that they should come unarmed. The Tunica promised to conform to this order; yet as soon as he reached home, he received thirty Natchez into his village, after taking the precaution to disarm them... A few days after, the Flour Chief [the last great existing chief of the Natchez] arrived among the Tonicas with a hundred men, their women and children, having concealed fifty Chickasaws and Corrois [allied tribes] in the canebrake around the village.

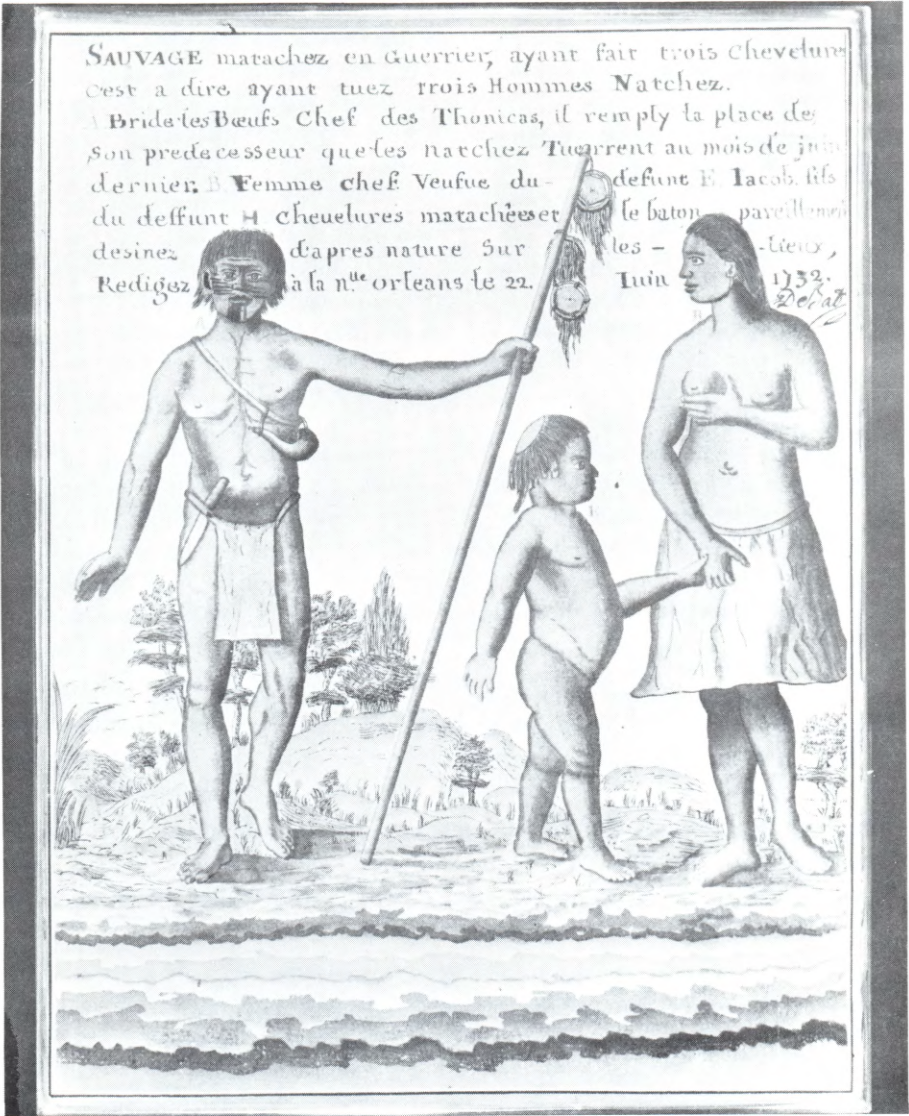
The head chief informed them that he was forbidden to receive them unless they gave up their arms; they replied that this was indeed their intention, but they begged him to consent to let them keep them some time longer, lest their women, seeing them disarmed, should think themselves prisoners condemned to death. He consented; then food was distributed to their new guests, and they danced till after midnight, after which the Tonicas retired to their cabins, thinking that of course the Natchez would also go to rest. But soon after, that is to say, one hour before day, for it was the 14th day of June, the Natchez, and apparently the Chickasaws and Corrois, although Perrier's letter says nothing on the point, fell upon all the cabins, and slaughtered all whom they surprised asleep. The Head Chief ran up at the noise, and at first killed four Natchez; but, overborne by numbers, he was slain with some twelve of his warriors. His war-chief, undismayed by this loss or the flight of most of his braves, rallied a dozen, with whom he regained the Head Chief's cabin; he even succeeded in recalling the rest, and after fighting for five days and nights almost without intermission, remained master of his village. The Tonicas on this occasion had twenty men killed and as many wounded. They killed of the Natchez thirty-three men, and took three prisoners, whom they burned.

Charlevoix 1872:116-117

Ghosts walked the land, and the land was unfriendly. Whether it was ghosts, or whether it was a matter of following precedent, the surviving Tunica elected to move yet once again. The Tunica traditions and French records are silent about this event. Perhaps the reason was that the move itself was of such a minor nature, being only a few miles to the south, to the site we now know as Trudeau. According to contemporary cartographic evidence, this move must have occurred shortly after the disaster, probably in 1731.



A Fatherland Incised bowl found at Angola may be a pottery vessel acquired by trade from the Natchez Indians.



DeBatz drawing (1732) of Bride les Boeufs, Tunica chief during the Trudeau years. He holds a staff to which three Natchez scalps are attached. Also shown are the wife and son of the Tunica's great chief, Cahura Joligo, who was killed the previous spring during the Natchez raid at Angola.

Trudeau

At Trudeau, the Tunica still maintained control of the Portage of the Cross and the important Red River confluence. Their continuing success in controlling trade and other economic pursuits at this vital crossroads is amply testified to by the so-called "Tunica Treasure." It was this extraordinary collection of European and native artifacts that stimulated renewed interest in Tunica history (Brain 1970, 1973, n.d.). The artifacts had been found in a mortuary context, that is to say that they had been deposited with the dead as grave offerings. Found with approximately a hundred burials were dozens of firearms, scores of European ceramic vessels, hundreds of metal kettles, hundreds of thousands of glass beads, a vast assortment of tools, ornaments, and other miscellany, as well as a goodly representation of native artifacts. The sheer quantity and variety of European items is unparalleled at any other known contemporary native site of the mid-18th century in the Southeast. How had the Tunica come to such "riches," material wealth so vast, moreover, that they could dispose of it in such quantity? The true answers are lost forever, of course, but their proven qualities of entrepreneurship coupled with the strategic move even closer to the northern limits of the permanent French settlements at Pointe Coupee only another few miles south must provide the major solution. After the final Natchez destruction, the Tunica lost much of their political and military value to the French who had counted upon them as a major pawn in those conflicts. Thus, they are not recorded as major recipients of "gifts to the savages" in the French records. In fact, even in this respect, there is little evidence of French beneficence during the troubled decades of initial contact at the earlier sites on the Yazoo and at Angola Farm. Clearly, during this middle third of the 18th century we must look to the efforts of the Tunica themselves. If we accept their role as entrepreneurs, what did they have of such exceptional value to the French that would occasion this accumulation of material wealth, aside from advantageous position and the already flourishing salt trade?

In a word, horses. It was the ability of the Tunica to control the horse trade that made them indispensable to the French. Curiously, this necessity to the European way of life depended upon native supply in the 18th century. Even though the colonists were provisioned by sea directly from Europe, horses seem to have been brought in only rarely. The reason was economic: put quite simply, horses were cheaper to

procure locally through an illicit trade established among many diverse Indian groups drawing upon the vast resources of the Spanish southwest. As noted by the historian Antoine Le Page du Pratz, the horses were

brought from New Mexico for the service of the French in Louisiana. I am ignorant of what view the Indians may have had in that commerce: but I well know, that notwithstanding the fatigues of the journey, these cattle, one with another, did not come, after deducting all expenses, and even from the second hand, but to about two pistoles a head; whence I ought to presume, that they have them cheap in New Mexico. By means of this nation we have in Louisiana very beautiful horses, of the species of those of Old Spain, which, if managed or trained, people of the first rank might ride.”

Le Page du Pratz 1774:166

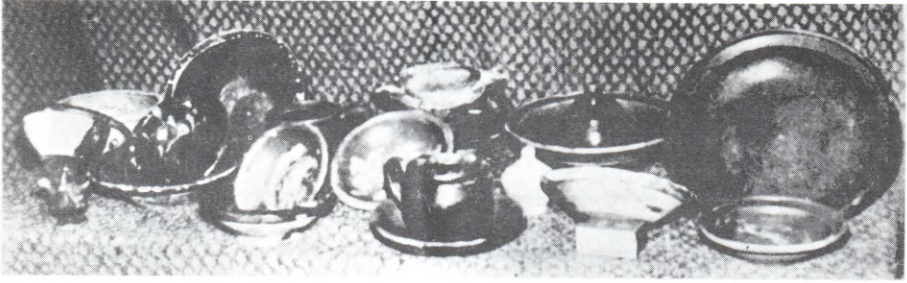
That the Tunica were leaders in this horse trade is explicitly stated by the official historian of New France, Father Charlevoix, who visited the great chief of the Tunica, Cahura-Joligo, in December 1721:

The chief received us very politely; he was dressed in the French fashion, and seemed to be not at all uneasy in that habit. Of all the savages of Canada [i.e., New France] there is none so much depended on by our commandants as this chief. He loves our nation, and has no cause to repent of the services he has rendered it. He trades with the French, whom he supplies with horses and fowls, and he understands his trade very well. He has learned of us to hoard up money, and he is reckoned very rich.

in Swanton 1911:312-313



Aboriginal pottery vessels from Trudeau indicate extensive trade between the Tunica and other Indian groups.



European ceramics recovered at Trudeau exemplify the primarily utilitarian nature of the collection called the "Tunica Treasure."

By their move even closer to the French settlements ten years later, the Tunica consolidated and strengthened their position. Their shrewdness at horse trading (" . . . he understands his trade very well") apparently more than made up for the diminished rewards as their military importance waned. Most significantly, this ability is most in keeping with their entrepreneurial tradition. The material wealth of the Tunica increased as they once again successfully adapted to a new situation. In the process, they became ever more acculturated to, and dependent upon, the European life-way. Nevertheless, it was this adaptability of the Tunica that was their greatest asset throughout the long story already told, and is undoubtedly the reason they are still with us today while most other aboriginal groups of the Mississippi Valley have long since succumbed to history.

Marksville

One day the Tunica chief was sitting on the bank. As he sat watching, some buzzards crossed the [river]. He spoke to his people. "Land lies to the west," he said. Then he sent his people. "If you get in the boat and go straight over there, you will find land," he said.

Haas 1950:139

Because of their lessened political and military value to colonial Louisiana, the Tunica figure little in the later 18th century official records. It is known that they moved around some after the French surrendered control of the Mississippi Valley in 1763, but they remained generally in the vicinity of Pointe Coupee for a number of years. Before the end of the century, however, they left the Mississippi Valley and settled near Marksville, Louisiana, on the Red River. The reasons for this move are lost to history, as the vague remembrance in their own tribals legends quoted above demonstrates.

CARTE PARTICULIERE

d'une partie de la Louifiane ou les Fleuve & Riviere
ont été relevés à loffeine & les Routes par terre relevés
mesurés aux pas par les C^{ts} Bouvin, de Vergés jng^{rs} & Sancer
& Sancer delinqueur.

SCAVOIR.

Le Fleuve d'Atenas ou Matlipa par le C^{te} Bouvin depuis la Baie jusqu'à
Natchez depuis ce Poste par le C^{te} de Vergés jusqu'à son camp
de la terre A. & de ce camp par le C^{te} Sancer jusqu'à la Riviere
à Margot ou tout les Postes Etablis & Provoisans joints ensemble
leurs Lignes.

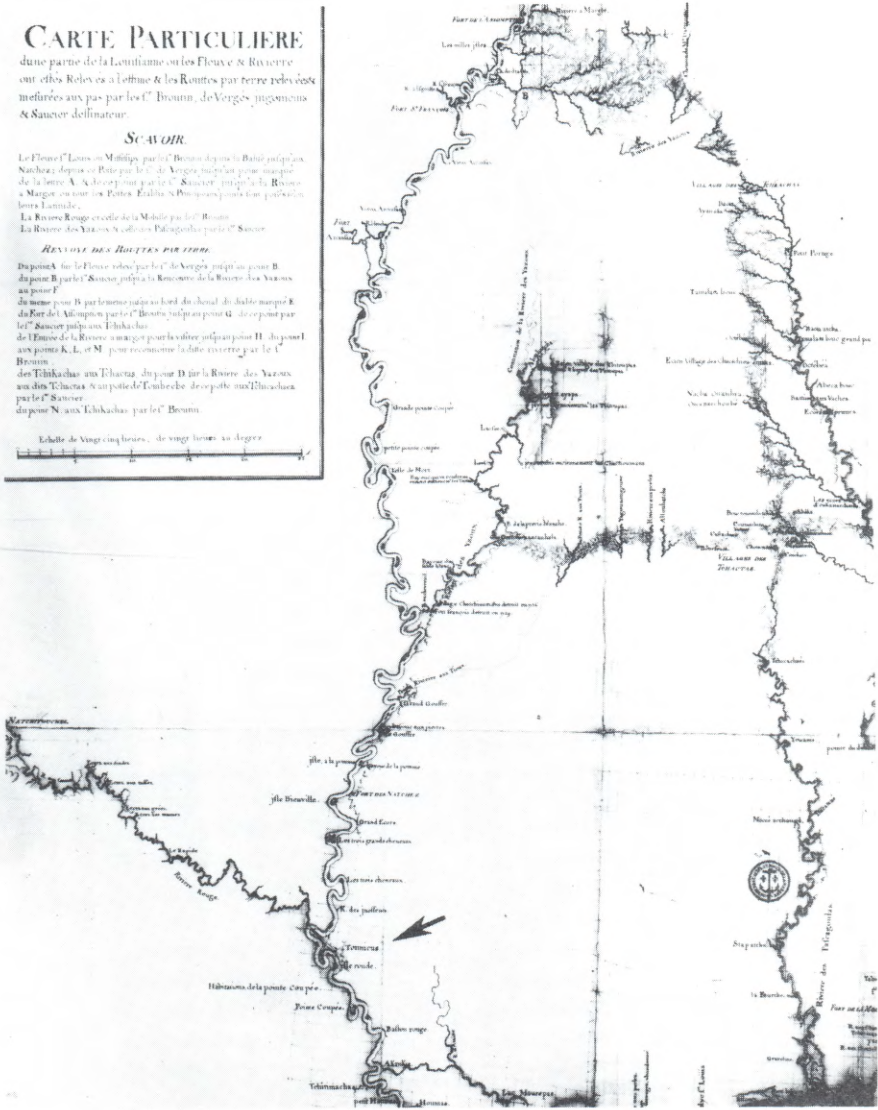
La Riviere Rouge & celle de la Mobile par le C^{te} Bouvin.

La Riviere des Yazous & celle de la Patagoula par le C^{te} Sancer.

REVOIR DES ROUTES par terre.

Depuis A. de la Riviere rouge par le C^{te} de Vergés jusqu'au point B.
de point B. par le C^{te} Sancer jusqu'à la Riviere des Yazous
au point F.
de même point B. par terre jusqu'au bord du canal de la terre marquée E.
de la terre de l'Atenas par le C^{te} Bouvin jusqu'au point G. de ce point par
le C^{te} Sancer jusqu'aux Tchickasas
de l'Embouche de la Riviere à Margot pour la terre jusqu'au point H. de ce point
aux points K, L, & M. pour reconnoître la dite riviere par le C^{te}
Bouvin
des Tchickasas aux Illinois depuis H. de la Riviere des Yazous
aux dits Tchickasas & au point de Tombecbe de ce point aux Illinois
par le C^{te} Sancer
de point N. aux Tchickasas par le C^{te} Bouvin.

Echelle de Vingt cinq lieues, de vingt lieues au degré.



Brouin map (1740) showing location of Tunica village opposite the mouth of Red River.

During the last two centuries, the Tunica have remained at Marksville, on the very lands they were first granted by Spanish authorities before the assumption of American control. As such, they are the first (permanent) people of this present-day town. Unlike some other "first comers" in our own history, however, they are among the last in social prestige and economic status. No longer a party to a privileged relationship, or filling a vital role, they are now among the disadvantaged, another victim of the New World.

Why, then, have the Tunica stayed? Simply answered, there was nowhere else to go. They had run out of room as events caught up with them. There are records that a few did flee further west to Oklahoma in the 19th century where they were absorbed by other Indian groups, but the majority elected to stay in Marksville. There they intermarried with first the Avoyel Indians and then the Biloxi. The Tunica are thoroughly acculturated to the prevailing Euro-American life-way, and have lost all of their material culture and most of their mental culture, including their language. However, they have preserved their ethnic identity and still recognize a "chief." This remarkable continuity, in the light of the fate of most other Lower Valley tribes, is a key to the history of the Tunica. Their ability to adapt to new situations, and thus preserve themselves, is what this story has been all about.

Summary

The Tunica are a good people. They did not commit any crime. They have always helped their white brothers . . . They have become nearly extinct.

Haas 1950:143

So ends the history of the Tunica, but not their story. The story is unusual and important. We have more than the documentation of the location and movements of a particular tribal group, and their importance at each location. We have here an intimate glimpse of a people as they participated in the great events of the late prehistoric and early historic periods. As such, the Tunica provide an incomparable key to those events.



Joseph Alcide Pierite, last chief of the Tunica—a chieftainship that extends in an unbroken line directly back into prehistory. Chief Joe died in 1976 and was succeeded by his son, Joe Jr., Chairman of the combined Tunica-Biloxi tribe.

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